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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000026

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STATE PASS TO CAPT. BILL JENSEN, NEA/I POLMIL

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TAGS: IZ MARR MCAP MOPS PGOV PINS PNAT PTER

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR IRAQI MINISTER OF DEFENSE ABDEL QADR JASIM AL-MIFRIJI

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Ryan Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Iraqi Minister of Defense Abdel Qadr arrives in Washington against a backdrop of encouraging news about security in Iraq, still tentative legislative progress, and just as the USG SOFA negotiating team begins its preliminary work prior to its initial meeting with the GOI later this month. The timing of this visit is advantageous because it affords an opportunity to encourage the minister to actively engage in the formation of an Iraqi negotiating team that is knowledgeable and inclusive and for his remaining actively engaged throughout the talks. It would also be useful to discuss the Turkey-PKK crisis, gain his perspective on the development of the Iraqi military, reassure him we are doing all we can to speed up equipment deliveries in the USG Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, and to reiterate the message the Secretary delivered during her visit on the need for progress on the political agenda. He will be candid in discussing the strengths and weaknesses of Iraqi military forces and the requirement for a long-term relationship with the United States, which he has publicly endorsed.

Turkey/PKK

¶2. (S) Abdel Qadr quickly grasped the negative domestic and international optics of a GOI "slow to take charge" following the October 7 PKK cross border ambush of Turkish soldiers, and he pressed for immediate action to avoid military escalation. In this vein, Abdel Qadr led a GOI delegation (including KRG reps) to Ankara October 26 to detail steps the GOI would take to rein in the PKK and was with General Petraeus to transfer the eight Turkish Army hostages back to Turkish control. He also indicated a willingness to have a Turkish counter-terrorism expert work with the GOI in Iraq. In GOI cabinet-level meetings, however, he has been highly critical of Turkish cross-border incursions. We should commend Abdel Qadr for his pro-active approach to the border situation and underscore the need to maintain the security measures taken by the GOI and KRG such as increased surveillance at airports, increased checkpoints, closure of PKK offices, and denial of supplies and materiel to PKK encampments.

¶3. (S) Abdel Qadr should be a part of our longer term strategy of encouraging a political solution to the problem through diplomatic engagements between GOI and GOT officials. If Turkish Deputy Chief of Defense Saygun makes his promised trip to Iraq to meet with MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus,

he should also meet with Abdel Qadr. Abdel Qadr has demonstrated that he is a serious interlocutor on this matter and should reinforce the GOI message publicly and privately that the PKK is a terrorist organization and has no place in Iraq.

Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)

14. (S) During negotiations on UNSCR renewal and Declaration of Principles, the GOI used a small, select staff from the Prime Minister's office for most discussions. A Sunni, Abdel Qadr will likely agree that this small circle should expanded into a more inclusive body before beginning negotiations on the Long Term Security Relationship (LTSR). Abdel Qadr's trip is a welcome opportunity to convey the message that Iraq's team must include appropriate technical experts from MOD and enjoy the support of all political groups. During discussions in Washington, we should emphasize to Abdel Qadr the scale of negotiations and requirement for lawyers and specialists who understand military, security, and technical issues. Moreover, we strongly suggest the Iraqi delegation include working-level representatives from government organs such as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Customs, Transportation, Communications, Finance, Labor and Environment. As background, the full-time USG negotiating team will have 11 members with about 30 technical experts on-hand as necessary to discuss individual issues.

Force Development

15. (C) Abdel Qadr has presided over a major transformation of
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the Iraqi Army--there are already over 160,000 "trained and equipped" Iraqi soldiers deployed throughout Iraq. In 2007 alone, the Iraqi Army added 42,800 soldiers while simultaneously prosecuting the war. By 2010, the Iraqi armed forces is expected to include an army of over 260,000 soldiers, an air force of 8,000 airmen, and a navy of 2,500 sailors. Abdel Qadr has said he intends it to be equal to other armed forces in the region. He described his greatest challenge as establishing a strong logistics and training system to sustain the planned force. Along these lines, he has told us that this year would see an emphasis on building infrastructure to support the forces and providing proper maintenance facilities at each operating base. Abdel Qadr has since followed up with funding allocations and contractual obligations to secure this effort. Since infrastructure remains the Achilles Heel in the Iraqi force structure, we should commend his efforts and encourage his continued emphasis in this critical area.

FMS vs. Other Weapons Purchases

16. (C) In discussions with the Ambassador, Abdel Qadr said he is pleased with the USG Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program and applauded the support of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) during the past year. He has described the training component included in FMS packages as especially valuable. He understands well that FMS eliminates the risk of corruption and ensures quality equipment but has also been very frustrated with the pace of deliveries. Recently Abdel Qadr has sought alternate sources of equipment from Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, and China. Last month, Qadr signed agreements worth \$230 million with Serbia's state arms dealer Yugoimport for personal protection equipment, machine guns, mortars, and sniper rifles. This visit will be an opportunity to explain in detail what we are doing to address Iraqi concerns to speed up the FMS process. Last week, Abdel Qadr signed Letters of Request to the USG for pricing and availability on major long term purchases of M1 tanks, LAV-25, 120mm mortars, and the OH-58 helicopters.

17. (S) On 13 December, the Deputy Commanding General of MNSTC-I briefed the MinDef regarding the need to move ahead with negotiations on an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). MNSTC-I estimates that an ACSA would greatly accelerate almost one-third of recurring logistics cases now covered by FMS. The MinDef agreed to develop an ACSA but several follow-on meetings with his staff have been cancelled. We should encourage Abdel Qadr to continue the process as a means of relieving stress on the FMS system and speeding up delivery of critical logistics services.

Biographical

18. (S) Although MinDef Abdel Qadr has now donned a business suit, he still carries the unmistakable air of a soldier. He is proud of his combat experience, as well as his survival in Saddam's prisons during the nineties for his opposition to the war with Kuwait. This toughness has served him well as an independent Sunni minister, and from our perspective, he has been a very effective apolitical and non-sectarian minister. He sees the ministry very much as his own. As a former general officer, however, he does not believe that he needs the advice of his senior military leadership, an approach that has caused strains between him and the Chief of the Defense Forces, GEN Babakyr Shawkt.

19. (S) With significant Coalition assistance, the Ministry of Defense is considered the best-run, most efficient relative to other Iraqi ministries and the MinDef has taken a strong stance against corruption and appearances of it within the MOD. Prime Minister Maliki continues to follow Abdel Qadr's advice on important security issues like the timing of Basrah's return to Provincial Iraqi Control, as well as the filling of highly sensitive military leadership positions. Although he is comfortable with some small-talk in English, he will use a translator for any substantive discussions.

10. (C) In our experience, Abdel Qadr has been willing to

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talk to Congress about the Iraqi security strategy and plans to rebuild the Iraqi military. We should take advantage of any opportunity to include members of Congress in his scheduled events or encourage the Iraqis to arrange additional private meetings with them if the schedule permits.

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